

## Emergency Support Function #15: **PUBLIC INFORMATION**

### Lead Agency:

- Department of Safety, Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Management (HSEM)

### Support Agencies:

- All ESF and Support Annex Agencies

## INTRODUCTION

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### A. PURPOSE

The purpose of Emergency Support Function #15 - Public Information (ESF #15) is to disseminate information on emergencies to the general public through the media. It is concerned with information in which local governments have requested State assistance, to coordinate, prepare and disseminate all emergency-related information through the media and other communication vehicles, including through public information lines established in support of the emergency.

ESF #15 must develop and implement strategies:

- Instilling confidence in the community that all levels of government are working in partnership to restore essential services and help individuals begin to put their lives back together;
- Working with the media to promote a positive understanding of federal, state and local response, recovery and mitigation programs;
- Providing all target markets with equal access to timely and accurate information about disaster response, recovery and mitigation programs;
- Managing expectations so that disaster victims have a clear understanding of all disaster response, recovery and mitigation services available to them; and
- Supporting state and local efforts to reach disaster victims with specific program information.

### B. SCOPE

ESF #15 is responsible for the development and dissemination of a variety of information, education, and instructions to the general public, government officials and the news media through direct contact, briefings, presentations, news releases and advisories, websites, social media postings, establishment of a Joint Information System and Center and oversight of public inquiry lines established in or for the support of emergency management activities.

Support includes, but is not limited to: serving as the official spokesperson (when designated) concerning state emergency management activities and involvement in emergency response and recovery operations; serving as the primary point of contact for the media and public; overseeing the Joint Information System (JIS), including the Joint Information Center (JIC); and coordinating community relations/outreach efforts as part of the State's emergency preparedness, response and recovery operations.

## SITUATION AND PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS

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### A. SITUATION

During a disaster or emergency, the means of dispersing public information to affected populations may be severely affected by overwhelming demand and/or damage to local media or infrastructure caused by a disaster. State assistance may be required to supply critical information. In addition, information circulated by others may often be vague, erroneous, or contradictory. The public will demand information in order to evaluate their situation, make appropriate plans for response and to lessen the anxiety that may occur. The development and dissemination of appropriate information is not only important for affected populations but also those outside the impacted area seeking information on loved ones possibly involved in the incident or to determine ways in which they may help.

### B. PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS

1. The public needs timely and accurate information for protection of life and property during preparedness for, response to and recovery from a disaster or emergency situation.
2. The level of preparedness will affect the public's perception of the emergency or disaster. Tourists will feel particularly vulnerable if they are unaware of the hazards or planned responses of the area.
3. The event may require numerous responding agencies to provide instructions and information. A comprehensive and collaborative approach to information sharing is vital.
4. The State may start or engage a current public information system to augment or enhance local capabilities or when requested by a local agency. A joint information system (JIS) may be initiated by the state to report on the State's preparedness, response, recovery and/or mitigation activities.
5. Preservation of life and property may hinge upon instructions and directions given by authorized State officials.
6. Accurate and expedited dissemination of information is critical, particularly when a terrorist incident has occurred. An act of terrorism may cause widespread concern, and on-going communication of accurate and up-to-date information will help calm fears and limit the collateral effects of the attack.
7. Establishing and maintaining an effective rumor control mechanism will help clarify emergency information to the public.
8. Some events can bring many reporters, photographers, and camera crews into the area which will create a heavy demand upon the emergency public information organization. All emergency workers should be instructed to refer inquiries to public information staff.
9. The public will utilize various venues to gather information including internet and social media outlets.
10. Some incidents will attract interest from government officials and other VIPs. A coordinated approach to meeting the needs of the VIPs and the responding agencies can best be accomplished by scheduling visits through the Joint Information Center.

## CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

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### A. GENERAL

1. State emergency public information will be coordinated through the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC). If a JIC is established, State-level emergency public information will be provided to the media and public through that facility, or one designated by the PIO.

Should a nuclear power plant incident occur, appropriate personnel will remain in the SEOC until the activation of the licensee's JIC. Upon activation of the licensee's JIC, the lead PIO will respond to that facility.

2. Agencies involved in the response should assign one lead representative to coordinate information from their agency with other PIO team members before it is released to the public.
3. To the extent possible, information should be coordinated through the JIC and with appropriate agencies prior to release. JIC staff should make record of pertinent information released at briefings and conferences. The JIC should continue to remain operational during all periods of SEOC activation.
4. Public Inquiry Lines/Hotlines should maintain records of numbers of calls received, calling areas, types of questions asked and other pertinent information, as directed by the PIO. The PIO will analyze such information and utilize it in the formation of public information releases.
5. The PIO will provide media with an overview of the emergency situation. Personnel associated with ESF #15 will not provide detailed information related to situations at the local level, as this information is best handled by local officials.
6. Public information and messaging should be made available to all populations, including those with functional or specialized needs. Alternate strategies will need to be developed to ensure these populations receive the most current and critical information in a timely manner.
7. Most people who have limitations that interfere with the receipt of, and effective response to information are self-sufficient, but need alternate communication methods. The individual is usually the best resource for determining the method for effective communication. This group is a large and diverse population of those who have difficulties hearing, seeing, speaking, or understanding. They may not be able to hear verbal announcements, see directional signage to assistance services, or understand how to get food, water and other assistance because of a hearing, understanding, cognitive or intellectual limitations. This population includes, but is not limited to, persons who:
  - a. Are ethnically and culturally diverse.
  - b. Have limitations or are unable to read or understand English.
  - c. Have reduced or no ability to speak.
  - d. Have reduced or no ability to hear.
  - e. Have limitations in learning and understanding.

In general, all ESFs may require technical assistance and/or guidance for meeting the needs of individuals with these challenges in a timely manner. However, close collaboration and the development of unique strategies will occur with ESF #2 – Communications and Alerting.

## **B. ORGANIZATION**

### **1. Organizational Chart (Command & Control)**

The Public Information Officer shall function as a component of the Command Staff under the direction and control of the EOC Director. **(See *Organizational Chart in SEOP Base Plan. Chapter IV.4.a*).**

### **2. Operational Facilities/Sites/Activities**

The Public Information Team may have to operate or participate with several emergency agencies and/or co-locate at several emergency facilities simultaneously (in-state or in another state through mutual aid). A listing of the teams and facilities through which ESF #15 may have to function follows:

- a. **Joint Information System (JIS)/Joint Information Center** – The joint information system mission starts as soon as an event begins that could develop

into a major disaster. Because of the critical nature of providing emergency information to disaster victims, time spent getting organized rather than responding at the time of an event can lead to confusion and a loss of public confidence.

The State Lead PIO for the disaster is responsible for directing and coordinating the joint information system (JIS) and for making sure the joint information center is established, staffed and functioning efficiently. They are responsible for implementing state media strategies that include systems to provide the disaster victims, the general public, and various target audiences with accurate, timely, consistent and easy-to-understand information about disaster response, recovery and mitigation operations.

When one or more agencies are involved in a State response, or upon request, a JIC will be established. The agencies involved with the response and, as capable, will assign a representative to the JIC to ensure a cohesive and collaborative release of information and fulfillment of other JIS related activities. The State PIO will assume the lead responsibility for the JIS unless otherwise designated.

- b. **State Emergency Operations Center** – Upon activation of the SEOC, the EOC Director will request the presence of Public Information Staff to report to the SEOC. Specific missions will be tasked to support the emergency response of the State response, ESFs and other Support agencies. The SEOC functions as the "clearinghouse" that is used to coordinate public information, affairs and external communications activities, including the set-up (as determined necessary) of public inquiry lines and a JIC. The JIC at the SEOC will be the focal point for release of information regarding state response and provide for the needed public affairs support and tracking of the status and activities of other facilities and entities activated by the SEOC, provide informational awareness to/from support agencies and any other matters necessary for an effective public information response necessary for the emergency operation.
- c. **State Emergency Operations Center Mission Tasking** - The Public Information Officer will assign request for assistance to their agency or agencies that have the most appropriate resources and expertise to accomplish the task. Mission Tasks will be posted to the appropriate emergency data management system and reviewed periodically to assure the most up-to-date information is provided.
- d. **Field Operations and Facilities** – Dependent upon the emergency response, support of personnel associated ESF #15 may be required "in the field." VIP visits, media interviews, etc. may be requested closer to the incident site(s) at which time, a member of the JIC should be present. The Public Information personnel at the SEOC should be informed of, and to the greatest extent possible, schedule such assignments to the field in consultation with the SEOC Director and the Incident Manager on the scene.

During some emergencies such as those involving incidents at nuclear power plants, PIO representatives may begin at the SEOC and then be activated to a JIC established at the site. A representative will remain at the SEOC to assure the effective information flow to and from the JIC to the SEOC.

It is understood that local public affairs personnel will maintain their responsibilities for public affairs and external communications to and from their residents and visitors. They may, however, request assistance from and/or become part of the State response JIS.

- e. **Public Inquiry Lines/Hot Lines** - Depending upon the incident, the PIO may activate public inquiry or “hot lines” to gather and provide information to the general public. Call-takers will be provided by the PIO the most up-to-date information available for public release. Public Inquiry Lines will document calls, including area of origination and types of calls/requests/comments. This information will be passed to the JIC to assist in determining appropriate messaging strategies to meet the needs of the public. Documentation of all calls received will be provided to HSEM/PIO at the closing of the lines.
- f. **Federal Resources** - When the PIO foresees or has a need for resources not otherwise available, action will be taken to secure such resources through the *National Response Framework* (NRF).

During an incident when federal resources are requested, Federal, State, and local authorities share responsibility for communicating information regarding the incident to the public. Actions taken are a critical component of incident management and must be fully integrated with all other operational actions to ensure the following objectives are met:

- i. Delivering incident preparedness, health, response, and recovery instructions to those directly affected by the incident.
- ii. Disseminating incident information to the public, including functional needs populations.

Requests for federal assistance will be made through the EOC Director (or designee) to FEMA.

- g. **Contracts and Contractors** - Agency(ies) contracts may be utilized or access to State of NH or private sector contracts may be made through coordination with ESF #7- Resource Support. Use of contracted personnel and services will be utilized only to supplement and not supplant those services available through normal state channels and resources.

## PHASED ACTIVITIES

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### A. PREVENTION ACTIVITIES

1. Reviewing member/support agency missions, capabilities and resources on a set basis. Maintaining up-to-date listings from each, including current points of contact.
2. Developing staffing rosters to be utilized during SEOC activations and assuring adequate training is provided to personnel to serve as representative in SEOC for extended periods of time.
3. Exploring news/information strategies including use of internet and social media.
4. Providing training and materials for public inquiry lines, including methods for collecting and documenting calls received and appropriate response.

5. Annually reviewing the Department of Homeland Security Core Capabilities and integrating tasks as appropriate.
6. Integrating NIMS principles in all planning.

**B. PREPAREDNESS ACTIVITIES**

1. Providing training and materials for public inquiry lines, including methods for collecting and documenting calls received and appropriate response.
2. Maintaining a current list of media contacts.
3. Preparing pre-scripted templates of news releases, media presentation, etc. for utilization during emergency situations.
4. Developing strategies to meet information needs of special and/or functional needs populations.
5. Annually reviewing the Department of Homeland Security Core Capabilities and integrating tasks as appropriate.
6. Integrating NIMS principles in all planning.

**C. RESPONSE ACTIVITIES**

1. Reviewing and updating of this Appendix on an annual basis.
2. Reviewing member/support agency missions, capabilities and resources on a set basis. Maintaining up-to-date listings from each, including current points of contact.
3. Developing staffing rosters to be utilized during SEOC activations and assure adequate training is provided to personnel to serve as representative in SEOC for extended periods of time.
4. Maintaining a current list of media contacts.
5. Preparing pre-scripted templates of news releases, media presentation, etc. for utilization during emergency situations.
6. Developing strategies to meet information needs of special and/or functional needs populations.
7. Providing training and materials for public inquiry lines, including methods for collecting and documenting calls received and appropriate response.

**D. RECOVERY ACTIVITIES:**

1. Continuing to assign and schedule sufficient personnel to cover an activation of the SEOC for an extended period of time. Providing updates and briefings for any new personnel reporting for duty. Maintaining and updating WebEOC as appropriate for all Public Information activities. Seeking information concerning projected date the SEOC will deactivate, as needed.
2. Continuing to evaluate and task personnel with support requests for impacted areas and populations.
3. Continuing to coordinate activities and requests with partner agencies and other support agencies.
4. Beginning deactivation sequence for unneeded facilities.
5. Determining length of time public inquiry lines will still be needed. Gathering documentation on calls and continue providing accurate and current information for operators. As appropriate, closing public inquiry lines.
6. Identifying and tracking any lost or damaged equipment and record any personnel injuries or equipment accidents.
7. Continuing to provide information to the media and public, as necessary.
8. Determining appropriate time to stand-down JIC and revert public affairs and external communications needs back to individual agencies. HSEM will continue to provide media with contact information and respond to questions/requests for information as to the overall state response and those of a general nature.

9. If mitigation and/or redevelopment phase is probable, start pre-planning needed activities/actions with agency, State, and/or federal officials.
10. Continue development of the “After-Action Report.”

#### **E. MITIGATION**

1. Providing updates and briefings for any new personnel reporting for or assigned to Public Information activities. Maintaining and updating WebEOC, as appropriate.
2. Publicizing significant accomplishments (Success Stories) that highlight mitigation efforts.
3. Supporting any continuing requests for information from the media or state/federal officials.
4. Continuing supporting local public information officials, as requested and as appropriate.
5. Continuing to provide preparedness and public safety messaging to the public.
6. Continuing to document matters that may be needed for inclusion in agency or state/federal briefings, situation reports and action plans.
7. Incorporating information received from public inquiry lines, activities taken and needed in development of “After-Action Report.” Utilize the “After-Action Report” in developing materials and preparations for future incidents.
8. Investigating new methods and channels of public information and external communications for possible use in future incidents, or as needed. Including those that may be pertinent to meeting the information needs of specialized or functional needs populations.

### **ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES**

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#### **A. ACTIVITIES ASSOCIATED WITH FUNCTION:**

Activities associated with ESF #15 include, but are not limited to:

1. All coordinating and cooperating agencies will provide available, trained personnel to serve as representatives in the SEOC. Maintain and update WebEOC as needed.
2. Establishing mechanisms and strategies to accommodate the public information and external communication needs of the public and various other audiences during an event.
3. Developing and being prepared to implement messaging for specialized populations and those with functional needs.
4. Utilizing information gathered from previous events/activities to ensure capabilities for a rapid, effective and efficient response.
5. Determining the organization and implementation strategy of a Joint Information System and establishment of a Joint Information Center.
6. Ensuring all personnel have sufficient training and capabilities to fulfill responsibilities during an event, including use of facilities and available electronic/technical systems (data management software, etc.)
7. Identifying and determining implementation capabilities of emergent communication methods and channels.
8. Encouraging all personnel to have access to their agency's available and obtainable resources, including current, up-to-date points of contact, letters of agreements, memorandums of understanding, resource and capabilities listings, mission statements, etc.
9. Ensuring that agency-specific and JIS plans are maintained and kept current.
10. Actively participating in and support preparedness activities and campaigns aimed at populations and organizations (i.e. [www.nh.gov/ReadyNH](http://www.nh.gov/ReadyNH), business emergency plans, etc.)
11. Participating in the evaluation, prioritization and mission assignment of Public Information resource requests submitted to the SEOC. Support requests through



available resources of cooperating agencies and other potential sources, including resources that are available through associations, compacts, other agency divisions or offices, and/or FEMA.

12. Supporting the development of situation reports and action plans during activation of the SEOC. Maintain updated information.
13. Assisting in the evaluation of human resource public affairs and external communication needs of the impacted populations.
14. Pre-scripting EAS and other messaging as appropriate.
15. Participating as appropriate and as requested in HSEEP-compliant drills and exercises.
16. Assuring all Public Information “lead personnel” (those who will play supervisory or directive roles, including SEOC representatives) is trained in NIMS and receive other appropriate related training.
17. Maintaining position logs in WebEOC, providing appropriate and pertinent information to other appropriate personnel.
18. Developing and implementing system/procedures for meeting the needs for VIP and media visits in the field.
19. Maintaining up-to-date media and state official contact lists.
20. Reviewing and updating Mission Tasking on a regular basis.
21. Providing Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) as requested to support emergency response activities, as requested and appropriate.

#### **B. COORDINATION WITH OTHER EMERGENCY SUPPORT FUNCTIONS:**

The PIO will coordinate, as appropriate, with ESFs and Support agencies by providing:

1. Notifying partners of available resources and capabilities.
2. Providing availability of subject matter experts for specialized requirements.
3. Providing available resources, capabilities and personnel for assisting ESFs and other Support agencies in fulfilling their missions.
4. Providing to establish a JIC to ensure public affairs and external communications needs of the public, and other audiences, are provided in a comprehensive, cohesive method.
5. Notifying any pertinent information that may impact the ability of the appropriate ESF/ to carry out their missions/tasks.

#### **C. SEOP HAZARD-SPECIFIC INCIDENT ANNEXES WITH ESF #15 RESPONSIBILITIES:**

- Terrorism
- Radiological Incident at Nuclear Power Plant
- Hazardous Materials
- Public Health Emergency

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#### **FEDERAL RESPONSE INTERFACE/STATE & INTERNATIONAL MUTUAL AID**

When the public affairs and external communication requests exceed the capability of the State or the incident rises to the level of national attention, the Public Information Officer will coordinate activities with the coordinating Federal agency for ESF #15 and the Public Affairs and External Communications Support Annex under the provisions of the *National Response Framework (NRF)*. State and International Mutual Aid agreements (EMAC/IEMAG, etc.) may also be activated as the situation warrants.



## ADMINISTRATION AND LOGISTICS

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### A. POLICIES:

1. All agency and Support Plans provide for administrative and logistical support necessary to maintain a 24-hour, 7-day-a-week sustained operation.
2. Administrative and logistical support of operational field elements when a JIC is established will be through the HSEM PIO who will serve as lead and all other appropriate supporting agencies. .
3. Provision is made by each participating agency to record and document all resources used in support of the emergency operation and provide such information to the HSEM PIO for consolidation and recording.
4. Participating agencies will be notified when threshold levels are reached for implementation of any federal assistance programs or requests from mutual aid compacts.

### B. NOTIFICATION AND REPORTING:

#### 1. Notification

- a. The N.H. State Police, a municipality or State Agency will notify HSEM that an incident has occurred, or has the potential to occur, that threatens or impacts an area of New Hampshire. HSEM will gather information for on-going situational awareness and notify ESFs, as appropriate.
- b. HSEM personnel will make the decision to activate the SEOC and determine level of activation. In some instances, due to the impact of the incident, the need for information and support from the PIO may precede the activation of the SEOC. When such occurs, the HSEM PIO, in consultation with the affected agencies and the HSEM Director, will make the decision to activate.
- c. If SEOC activation is determined to be necessary, the HSEM Director will notify the HSEM PIO of the activation and to have them request designated personnel to report to the SEOC.
- d. The HSEM PIO will then notify the appropriate Coordinating Agencies and determine coverage/duty roster needs for the Support Agency presence in the SEOC and at other appropriate JIC facilities that may need to be established. WebEOC will be utilized to provide continual situational awareness.
- e. All Support agencies will make appropriate notifications to their appropriate regions, districts or local offices.
- f. The above notification process will be utilized for all phases of activation and activities in which the ESF and/or will be involved.

#### 2. Event Reporting

- a. Event and position logs should be maintained by each agency in sufficient detail to provide historical data on activities taken during the event.
- b. Event and position logs should be maintained by each agency in sufficient detail to provide historical data on activities taken during the event. Agencies are also expected to keep their Lead Agency updated upon all activities and actions. The HSEM PIO will be responsible for reporting activity to the EOC Director and other appropriate incident leadership.
- c. The Coordinating Agency will be responsible for making periodic reports to affected ESF Lead and other Coordinating agencies on activities taken by the PIO, in total, during the event and assure they are properly documented.

#### 3. Agreements/MOUs, etc.

Coordinating and Cooperating Agencies will maintain up-to-date agreements and Memorandums of Understanding, Letters of Agreement (MOU/LOA) with various other agencies, regions, states or countries, as appropriate. Each agency is responsible for keeping these documents updated and with appropriate points of contact. Cooperating Agencies should keep the Coordinating Agency informed of any such agreements which may impact resources or capabilities during an emergency incident. The State of New Hampshire also maintains agreements and mutual aid compacts on behalf of various organizations. These may be activated as the situation warrants.

## **DEVELOPMENT, MAINTENANCE AND IMPLEMENTATION OF ESF/SEOP**

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### **A. RESPONSIBILITIES**

Development, maintenance, and implementation of this Appendix rest with the Coordinating Agency in consultation and collaboration with the Cooperating Agencies.

Coordination, input, and assistance should be sought from all the agencies involved in the Appendix activities. An annual review of the Appendix should be conducted with information provided to HSEM for incorporation into the next SEOP scheduled update. This does not preclude the incorporation of any changes immediately into the Appendix. If information collected is of serious enough nature to require immediate revision, HSEM will produce such a revision of the SEOP ahead of schedule.

### **B. CORRECTIVE ACTIONS**

Following each activation, exercise, etc., an After-Action Report should be conducted by the Coordinating Agency with the appropriate Cooperating Agencies. A Corrective Action/Improvement Plan should be developed and incorporated into the response activities when updated.

### **C. UPDATING & REVISION PROCEDURES**

The primary responsibility for the development and overall maintenance of the SEOP belongs to HSEM. Assistance and input will be sought from all ESFs and Support agencies.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

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### **A. PLANS**

1. State Hazard Mitigation Plan
2. Individual Coordinating & Cooperating Agencies' Public Information Plans DRAFT
3. JIS Plan DRAFT (Maintained at HSEM)

### **B. LISTINGS/MAPS**

Maintained by individual Coordinating & Cooperating Agencies

1. Media Contacts Lists DRAFT
2. Agency PIO Contact Lists DRAFT

### **C. MOUs/LOAs**

Developed and maintained by Coordinating & Cooperating Agencies

1. Emergency Management Assistance Compact
2. International Emergency Management Assistance Compact

**D. NATIONAL RESPONSE FRAMEWORK – ESF #15**

1. NRF Public Affairs and External Communications Support Annex